

National Catholic Theater Conference

PRODUCTION CALENDAR

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NATIONAL THEATRE CONFERENCE

The National Theatre Conference Convention held in New York this Thanksgiving weekend had as its goal 'One Theater.' While the unanimity of Professional and Non-Professional elements seemed extremely dubious, discussions were at least animated.

Mr. Gnesin of Chicago's Goodman Theater made an urgent plea in the closing session for a higher standard of acting in community and college theater. Citing the amazing growth of the non-commercial theater to its 250,000 productions running at least two performances last year, Mr. Gnesin claimed that we could not survive if the acting - tremendously important to the audience - were not improved. Though we work individually with particular difficulties in each theater, that one goal we are under compulsion to reach if we would maintain and increase our audience.

At the tail-end of a lengthy session came a report of NTC's investigation into entertainment of returning soldiers. To the summary which had been mailed previously to members was added a note on the men's interest in scenes from current plays. If you are arranging for hospital entertainment, investigate through the Special Service Officer the possibility of release of desirable material now on Broadway for these special events. Choice of material is particularly important; in one hospital selection is made in cooperation with local Red Cross Officer.

Quite apart from NTC's formal investigation we have learned some helpful pointers from Richmond's Catholic Theater Guild, which has been providing entertainment for wounded men flown direct to Richmond's hospitals from European battlefields: fixed programs not more than one-half hour in length, but the men like to have the players, in costume, mix among them after performance; cookies or trifles presented by the players cement good will.

RADIO TODAY FOR TOMORROW
by Courtney Savage

Now is the time for all ambitious theater groups to work on future radio programs. If your Radio Committee is not able to obtain worthwhile air time now, don't be discouraged. At the moment there is little free time which can be allotted to local religious or civic groups; commercial broadcasting conditions are prosperous and stations donate a considerable portion of their schedules to government propaganda. The opportunity you have for careful preparation should be welcomed.

The initial requirement for the show you build must be sustained interest and entertainment, and the script itself must be the major consideration. If you are building a straight dramatic script for a 15 or 30 minute show, don't count on good acting to save it.

Granting this is true, should an effort be made to find original material, or should the series be documentary? If your group boasts a gifted writer capable of turning out a to-flight original every week, then by all means use such stories. But there aren't many such writers even in the commercial field, and the documentary script seems more practical. Just what constitutes good documentary script? Is the dramatization of a life or an event more interesting?

A life probably holds more easily adapted drama than an event. Father Mulvey's exciting dramatizations enacted on the Catholic Hour last spring proved this. He chose contemporary figures, interpreting their philosophy of life and death in a way to bring acclaim from severest radio critics. A careful perusal of the history of the Church will disclose dozens of good stories centering around men and women whose adventures will be the more interesting because they are unfamiliar. I can think of a Sister who traveled the Santa Fe Trail, met up with Billy the Kid and Kit Carson, and later worked to found now famous hospitals. Another story could be written about a Bishop of New York who fought to overcome prejudice and actually ordered the men of his parishes to stand guard about the churches when the opposing group threatened to burn them. State after state has little known stories, chapters of the American Way as interpreted by Catholic philosophy.

Remember, no preachments, no long speeches. Keep the dialogue alert. The audi-

STAGING "CHRISTMAS ON THE VILLAGE SQUARE"
by Sister Mary Peter, O. P.

The strolling gypsy players in "Christmas on the Village Square" love to act, and their imaginations transcend all difficulties of space and time. There is nothing incongruous to them in the rapid transformation from role to role. One could hardly call them pious folk, but their faith is simple and deep and their reverence from the heart. They are on familiar terms with sacred truths, but there is no levity. They have homely humor but they are never flippant about holy things. The play calls for spirit and sincerity, joyousness and devotion.

The audience can be drawn into the action delightfully, though audience participation must not be overdone. The bystanders who have come to watch the gypsies and who stay to be entertained may be placed in imagination out front where the theater audience is. In the Nativity scene, Melchior invites the spectators to join him in the Hail Mary, and if the players have been successful, the response is a moving experience in the theater. At the close of Part 2 all may join in a joyous Christmas song as the gypsies dance before the Infant Jesus. The production may end with this scene if a short Christmas program is desired.

In performances of the play which have been done at Rosary College the staging has been simple in the extreme. The open atmosphere of the Village Square was sustained because the curtain was not closed between scenes. For the play within the play (the Nativity scene), the function of a curtain can be secured by some kind of hanging - blanket or shawl, suspended from a clothesline upstage. This clothesline is likewise a convenient place for costume accessories. Costume changes should be reduced to a minimum; one suggestive feature such as a hat or cane is sufficient to indicate change in character. Gypsies do not have much space for luggage: elaborate costuming or staging would be out of order.

ence must be entertained. Don't label it so strongly it will be shunned as "religious" but instead strive for so absorbing a show that listeners will remember it next day - and realize that what they heard was an example and a philosophy worth following. Audition the polished show, and the "chief" will find a spot for you when it is available.

CROSS-COUNTRY CIRCUIT

Cincinnati - For their Sodality Day Program, Edgehill Players of Our Lady of Cincinnati College will present a pageant and series of tableaux from Father Lynch's "A Woman Wrapped in Silence," with choric speech group assisting.

Convent, N.J. - "Christmas on the Village Square" has been chosen by the Dramatic Association of the College of St. Elizabeth; production December 21.

Davenport - Junior Cameo Players of Immaculate Conception Academy offer "Summons of Sariel" and "Don't Tell a Soul," Dec. 3, Dyersville, Ia. "The Song of Bernadette" is the choice of Xavier High School Dramatic Club for December production.

El Paso - Lower grades of Loretto Academy in an operetta "In Quest of Santa Claus" - Dec. 17 for the orphans; 18, for friends. Grand Rapids - St. Joseph's Seminary has chosen "Career Angel" for its traditional December invitation performance.

Montreal - Dec. 14-16, Dramatic Society of Loyola College presents "Career Angel"

New Orleans - Dec. 13, sixteen days after closing "The Song of Bernadette" the Thalpomenians resume the stage for Christmas performance of "His Star", a product of CU playwriting class.

New Rochelle - Props and Paint of the College of New Rochelle follow up their successes ("Remona," given for Peter's Pence and "The Miser") with Laurence Housman's "Bethlehem" for Christmas.

Richmond - Catholic Theater Guild inaugurates its practice of inviting out-of-town performers (individuals and groups) to Richmond with an evening of dramatic monologues by Adele Van Hooydonck, formerly associated with Carroll Club Players.

Washington - Nov. 19-Dec. 2, at Catholic University Theater, "Lute Song," a Chinese play.

West Hartford - Dec. 14, The St. Joseph College Play for the Season of Christ's Nativity, by Queen's Company.

Weston, Mass. - Dec. 10, "The Song of Bernadette" at Regis College, Sister Alicette director, saw the CU production this summer and is experimenting with projected background scenes. Regis is backing CU drama all the way with the purchase of the balcony for a Boston performance of "Sing Out Sweet Land."

Wichita - Actors and choral group at Mt. Carmel Academy join forces for Christmas "Why the Chimes Rang" and the Christmas episodes from "A Woman Wrapped in Silence."

OUR BROADCASTERS

The radio group of Loras College, The Voice of Loras, has its own group membership in the Conference. Two Dubuque stations carry its programs, five each week. Afternoon periods a regular curricular activity, are taken by WKBB. Evening programs, twice weekly, are broadcast by KDTH. Father Donohue, the director, reports that all of the material used on the programs since the start has originated at Loras. Plays because of limited rehearsal time present difficulties, and periods frequently are given over to discussion groups, news reports, music, radio speech class and creative writing projects.

College of St. Francis at Joliet, Ill. is installing broadcasting equipment for hookup with Joliet, later to be extended to Aurora and Indiana. Formal opening of the studio in Speech Hall is scheduled for January 1945.

WFAS, White Plains, offers its facilities to New Rochelle's radio production classes. First on the fall season was an original "To Each Man a Star," followed by "Glimpses of Victor Herbert," a Thanksgiving special, and an interview with students on hobbies.

Helen Feeney's "Long Distance 1944", radio adaptation of the Pope's Christmas message will reach Richmond and Minneapolis audiences this month. Calling for two women, plus extra telephone operators heard momentarily, the script wins effectiveness with a minimum of cast and production difficulties for Catholic Theatre Guild of Richmond and Academy of Holy Angels. The latter broadcasts over KSTP, Minneapolis.

Most recent addition to the library is "The Land of the Free," volume of scripts produced by NCCM on the Catholic Hour in 1941. Though limited to NBC network stations for broadcasting purposes, except by special permission from Commission on American Citizenship of CU, the scripts may be dramatized in schools and church halls without further permission. The scripts written by Father Mulvey, O. M. I., which we heard on the Catholic Hour this spring will be published shortly.

Pittsburgh's Catholic Theater Guild is using two of "The Land of the Free" sketches for its broadcasts Dec. 9 and 16. On Dec. 23, "Melody Immortal" from the Queen's Work is scheduled. All broadcasts over WCAE at 6:30 p.m.

BROADWAY ARRIVALS SINCE SEPTEMBER
by Mrs. Christopher Wyatt

Embezzled Heaven - Distinguished production but play not so moving as story. Miss Barrymore very beautiful but never a peasant.

Harvey - Best fantastic comedy for years. Frank Fay has come into his own.

I Remember Mama - Extremely touching and amusing. Beautiful performance by Mady Christians and whole cast.

Rhapsody - Impossible book with ravishing sets and ballet; full of melody.

Sadie Thompson - Except for ballet very poor. June Havoc can act but can't sing; there are no songs to sing in any case.

School for Brides - Shows need for censor.

Snafu - Farce about returning veteran of sixteen. Many laughs, some bad language.

Soldier's Wife - Very human and amusingly acted comedy of civilian readjustment.

The Late George Apley - Leo Carroll, one of our favorite actors, at his tops in a very amusing drama by George Kaufman.

The Streets Are Guarded - Laurence Stal-

lings just misses a great play about the Air Force, the Navy, and the Marines.

TANGIBLE RECOGNITION

Sister Mary Donatus, C.I.M., was awarded first-prize medal for her one-act play on Ireland by the Irish Counties Association of New York at their Annual Feis on Fordham Campus. Sister Donatus has also written "Pageant of Kings" for her Cue and Curtain Players' Christmas program at Immaculata College.

Martin Crowe, Catholic Theater of Detroit, earned publication in October's Extension Magazine for his story "I Remember You." It had previously been produced by Detroit as a radio script.

Anticipated as Selznick's most important venture in 1945 is screening of "The Scarlet Lily," a life of Mary Magdalene. Technicolor and Ingrid Bergmann. Rev. E. F. Murphy, Pastor of Blessed Sacrament Church, New Orleans, is the author of the novel which was bought by Hollywood when it was in the galleyproof stage.

Catholic Theater Guild of Louisville bowed in the season last month with "Junior Miss," Fred Karem, director, elatedly reports this season subscriptions have doubled last year's total.

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RADIO BIBLIOGRAPHY
by Rev. C. McElroy, O. Carm.

The Radio Workbook by Mary Agnes Schroeder (Queen's Workshop of the Air) for the beginner.

Radio Directing by Earle McGill, best on production (and others agree).

Radio Writing by Max Wylie, classic work Handbook of Broadcasting by Waldo Abbot, how to broadcast effectively.

Columbia Workshop Plays by Douglas Coulter, 14 excellent plays.

Best Broadcasts of 1938-39 published by Whittlesey House, very good.

Handbook of Radio Writing by Eric Barnouw, concerned with technique and market.

WICHITA PLAY FESTIVAL

The Masquettes of Sacred Heart Junior College will hostess the 4th Annual Catholic Play Festival to be held at Wichita in April 1945. Other Conference members in Kansas and nearby states will contribute productions for the Festival.

VISITORS

Rev. R. E. O'Kane gave a day to Executive Committee problems in New York recently.

Holy Redeemer Parish Theater Guild joined the Conference in style with Rev. Walter Carrom, Sponsor, and Wilfrid Scott, Director, appearing in person. As a new group the Guild has the tremendous advantage of excellent stage and auditorium facilities. We look for big news from Rochester soon.

Rev. J. J. Donohue and Rev. K. G. Schroeder, Loras, and Sister Mary Donatus, C.I.M. of Immaculata, joined Rev. Urban Nagle, O.P., and Mrs. Wyatt for a meeting of the Play Listing Committee at headquarters on November 24.

BROOKLYN CYO OFFERS DIRECTOR'S COURSE

A series of lecture-demonstrations has been arranged by Brooklyn's CYO Drama Director, Rev. Michael J. Fleming. This year's program is the outgrowth of last season's course to train leaders in parish dramatic activities. Panel of lecturers includes Dennis Gurney, Director of Blackfriars' Guild. Two groups, apprentice and experienced, meet for hour sessions on successive Sundays.

